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Book Reviews

THE MESSAGES OF THE POETS¹

Our Bible is the remains of a noble literature. Many kinds of literary forms meet in it. A knowledge of these and of their variant nature is of supreme moment for a proper appreciation and a correct interpretation of the biblical message. What if we find songs of love and war and revenge and valor set in the sacred page! The melodies of the street and the vineyard and the hearth mingle their voices with the passion of the suffering prophet and the calm reflections of the wise, or the narratives of the historian, or the praises of multitudes within the gates of Zion. Literary differentiation is a means to true interpretation.

The editors of "The Messages of the Bible" are to be commended for the comprehensive scheme they have adopted in putting the general reader into intelligent relation with the Bible. In the "Historical Series for Bible Students" one is made acquainted with the scenes and situations that gather about the various events. The present series aims at giving "the exact impression which the words as originally heard or read must have made upon those for whom they were delivered." No attempt is made to reproduce the technical and critical apparatus of criticism. The results of scholarship are presented in popular form.

The Messages of the Poets comprises a study of the books of Job, Canticles, and of some thirty poems scattered through the books of the Bible. The name of the author, professor of Semitics in Cornell University, guarantees all that is desired in scholarship. He has endeavored to give the original poems in an English translation which reveals the Hebrew metre and strophic structure. In the preface we meet an interesting statement, viz., that "every new effort to interpret them has deepened the conviction of the author of this book that most of them belong to an earlier period than is generally admitted by the leading critics today. . . . The age of David and Solomon appears to have been richer in literary productions of abiding worth than recent scholars have been disposed to acknowledge. On the other hand, the older songs seem to have preserved more of the polytheism and crude

¹ *The Messages of the Poets*. By Nathaniel Schmidt, M.A. New York: Scribner, 1911. 415 pages. \$1.25.

religious practices left behind by Israel's subsequent growth than has been suspected." The author claims the distinction of discovering the poetic character of the Song of Youth and Age in Ecclesiastes.

The scheme of the book is admirable. A good bibliography is appended. The introduction assumes the character of a first division in the volume. It consists of seven chapters dealing with (1) the poetry of the ancient Hebrews; (2) the general character of this poetry; (3) the form of Hebrew poetry, as rhythm, metre, parallelism, strophic structure, assonance, alliteration, rhyme; (4) the text and translation; (5) the poets of Israel; (6) the ethical value of the poems; (7) their religious significance.

In the main division of the volume each poem is translated, a set of notes is supplied, and an exposition given. The attempt to reproduce a strophic structure will have a markedly beneficial effect on the English reader. From the standpoint of the consensus of Hebrew scholars this is where the volume may be deficient. To determine the strophic structure of Hebrew poetry is one of the most perplexing problems in Old Testament study. The accidents of time and possibly later systems of accentuation may have obscured the first form, whatever its nature may have been. Not a few scholars feel that in many cases it is doubtful if we can recover the original. Here there will doubtless be some disagreement with the author. It would seem that the writer agrees frequently with Duhm. Thus the dialogues of Job, except the Elihu prose address, is put in a four-line strophe. Does a four-line strophe correspond to the thought-divisions found in the speeches? Six, eight, ten, twelve, sixteen, seem to occur. In chap. 4 eight seems to be the prevailing structure; in chaps. 6 and 7 twelve, with possibly sixteen in two cases; in chaps. 9 and 10 twelve, with several smaller groups. Chap. 28 is regarded as an interpolation. The author finds a fourteen-line strophe. To get this vs. 12 (= vs. 20) is inserted before vss. 1 and 7. Vs. 24 is placed after vs. 11, and vs. 28 is omitted altogether. Numerous deletions are found according to the personal interpretation.

If from the shorter poems we take the Song of Moses (Deut. 32:1-43), we find that it is arranged in six-line strophes. The following notes explain the treatment.

Vss. 5-7 seem to be an interpolation. In vs. 8 we should read with the Greek version "sons of God" instead of "sons of Israel"; in vs. 9 strike "for" and substitute "Israel" for "his people"; and in vs. 11 read "upon his pinions." Vs. 12 interrupts the description and is clearly a

marginal gloss. "Earth" is an addition, making the line too long in vs. 13*a*; "thou shalt drink" in vs. 13*b* and the second line in vs. 15, as seen by the personal pronoun, as well as the fourth line, are also additions. Vss. 17 and 18 are an interpolation. "And he said" is added in vs. 19, correctly so far as the sense goes, but making the line too long. Vss. 29-31 are an interpolation. Vs. 39 is also interpolated.

Most scholars find the strophic system here to be irregular, or give up the attempt to recover one if such really existed. What shall we say of the much older Song of Deborah (Judg. 5:2-31) which we find arranged in four-line strophes? The metrical and strophical arrangement of this poem is exceedingly perplexing if we are to judge by the remarks of exegetes. In such cases there will be great variance in opinion. We would rather have preferred less regular strophes and the inclusion frequently of more of our present text. Are we certain that the early popular poetry of the Hebrews was such a finished product? Naïve and emotional, breaking forth in joyous and patriotic and martial outburst, we would not expect to find the finished product of later ages.

The translations convey the strong, virile character of early Hebrew poetry. The author rightly calls our attention to the low religious life as seen in the idea of God. As time goes on, Hebrew poetry becomes increasingly religious, more thoughtful and subjective, and in all probability more regular in structure.

The present volume goes forth to a good service. It will enliven interest in biblical poetry. Scholars may have a difference of opinion on some of the primitive forms, but the impression created in the mind of the English reader by the literary ability of the religious poets of Israel will be beneficial in many ways.

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